

Message Text

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SUBJ: TIJANI ABID HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE: AUGUST 23, 1978

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1. UGTT SECRETARY GENERLA TIJANI ABID HELD PRESS
CONFERENCES FOR TUNISIAN AND FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN
TUNIS AUGUST 23. PURPOSE FOR PRESS CONFERENCE WAS TO
REPORT ON FIRST SIX MONTHS' ACHIEVEMENTS OF NEW UGTT
LEADERSHIP.
CONFERENCE OPENED WITH FORMAL
STATEMENT BY ABID FOLLOWED BY QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR.
ACCORDING TO REPORTERS PRESENT, ABID RESPONDED CLEARLY
AND QUICKLY, DEMONSTRATING GREATER EASE AND KNOWLEDGE
THAN USUAL. MAJOR PORTION OF ABID'S OPENING REMARKS
EXAMINED CURRENT RELATIONS BETWEEN UGTT AND INTERNATIONAL
LABOR BODIES, AND DESCRIPTION OF GROWING UGTT SUPPORT
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AMONG WORKERS. QUESTIONS CENTERED ON CURRENT UGTT
LEADERSHIP'S RELATIONS WITH ARRESTED UNION MEMBERS AND
WITH DESSIDENT LABOR ELEMENTS AND MSD OPPOSITION FORCES.

2. ABID REMARKED THAT IN GENERAL UGTT'S RELATIONSHIP
WITH INTERNATIONAL LABOR BODIES WAS "EXCELLENT,"

ALTHOUGH E NOTED CERTAIN EXCEPTIONS. HE ASSERTED THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN UGTT AND ICFTU WERE "NORMAL," AND UGTT REMAINED A MEMBER OF THAT ORGANIZATION. THIS RELATIONSSHIP HAD UPS AND DOWNS, HE ADMITTED, BUT NEGOTIATIONS WERE CONTINUING TO REACH UNDERSTANDING WHICH WOULD FURTHER NORMALIZE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS. WHEN PRESSED TO ELABORATE, ABID REPLIED THAT DISCUSSIONS WERE STILL CONFIDENTIAL: HE DID VENTURE THAT A AGREEMENT WOULD INCLUDE HIS REQUESTING A PRESIDENTIAL PARDON IN CASE HIS IMPRISONED PREDECESSOR, HABIB ACHOUR, AND OTHER TRADE UNIONISTS WERE CONVICTED. HE THEN LAUNCHED AN ATTACK AGAINST THE FRENCH CGT FOR ITS "CHRONIC INTERFERENCE" IN TUNISIAN LABOR AFFAIRS. (THE CGT, AS WELL AS MOST NON-COMMUNIST LHBOR CENTERS, HAVE CRITICIZED GOT'S HANDLING OF UGTT ARRESTS AND TRIALS.) ABID SAID THAT CURRENT UGTT LEADERSHIP HAD NO PROBLEMS WITH THE ICATU (ARAB LABOR ORGANIZATION), WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE OF THREE REGIONAL BRANCHES LED BY LIBYAN ABOU BAKER JALLOUD. HE CHARACTERIZED JALLOUD AS AN EXTREMIST WITH NO LABOR CREDENTIALS WHO IS TRYING TO TAKE OVER ARAB LABOR MOVEMENT. ABID REMARKED THAT ICATU ITSELF AS A WEAK REED BECAUSE OF ITS INTERNAL DISUNITY.

3. THE SECRETARY GENERAL NEXT CITED VARIOUS DATA WHICH REFLECTED UGTT INTERNAL ACTIVITIES: MEETIPGS HELD, OFFICES OPEND OR ESTABLISHED, 10,000 NEW MEMBERSHIPS, UNCLASSIFIED

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INITIATIVES TO OBTAIN REINSTATEMENT OF FIRED WORKERS, AND COOPERATIVE EFFORTS WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND EMPLOYERS' GROUPS TO CHECK HISTORICAL RAMADAN FOOD PRICE INCREASES. TIJANI ABID ASSERTED THAT THE PRESENT UGTT WAS ASSISTING AROUND 100 OF THE FAMILIES OF ARRESTED MEMBERS AND CADRE. HE SAID THAT THIS ASSISTANCE, WHICH VARIED FROM 75 TO 240 DOLLARS EQUIVALENT PER MONTH, REPRESENTED 60-70 PERCETN OF THESE FAMILIES' INCOMES DURING THE SEVEN MONTHS THEIR BREADWINNERS HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED AWAITING TRAIL. ABID ATTACKED LEADERS OF RIVAL FORCE OUVRIER TUNISIEN (FOT), PAINTING THEM AS CHRONIC TROUBLMAKERS TO UNION CAUSE AND AS COMMUNIST INFLUENCED. (SEE REFTTEL FOR BACKGROUND.) RESPONDING TO QUESTION, ABID SAID THAT OPPOSITIN GROUP OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (MDS) ALWAYS HAD BEEN HOSTILE TO UNION ACTIVITIES AND WOULD TRY TO CONTROL WORKERS' ORGANIZATIONS IF GIVEN CHANCE.

4. COMMENT: WE CONSIDER THIS PERFORMANCE PRIDICTABLE, IF PERHAPS MORE POLISHED THAN CUSTOMARY. ABID HEWED CLOSELY TO THEMSE WHICH PSD PARTY PRESS HAD STRESSED IN

RECENT WEEKS: COMMUNIST INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS,
PERFIDY OF A PARTICULAR LIBYAN "LABOR LEADER," TREACHERY
OF FOT, DUPLICITY OF MDS AND UGTT ACHIEVEMENTS UNDER NEW
STEWARDSHIP. THE NEWS IS ABID'S CLAIM OF 10,000 NEW
MEMBERS AND HIS CLAIM OF UGTT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
TO IMPRISONED MEMBERS'S FAMILIES. WE ASSUME THAT ONE
REASON FOR ABID'S PYESS COMFERNCE--APART FROM SIX
MONTHS' ANNIVERSARY-- MAY HAVE BEEN TO RENDER AN
ACCOUNTING OF HIS LEADERSHIP, ANTICIPATING THE
PRESIDENT'S RETURN TO TUNISIA AT END OF MONTH.
KING

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